

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 AID-20 PC-04 NIC-01 OPR-02

EB-11 COME-00 DRC-01 /119 W
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O P 140035Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2453

INFO USCINCSO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMCONGEN BELIZE

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 1453

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GT

SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN ELECTIONS: GOVERNMENT CANDIDATE LAUGERUD

OFFICIALLY ELECTED PRESIDENT - ELECTION REPORT NUMBER 34

(FINAL)

1. THE GO-CONTROLLED CONGRESS RANG DOWN THE CURTAIN
ON GUATEMALA'S CURRENT ELECTORAL FARCE ON MARCH 12
WHEN, ACTING ON A FRAUDULENT POPULAR VOTE COUNT, IT
ELECTED THE GOVERNMENT-BACKED CONSERVATIVE MLN-PID
COALITION CANDIDATES GENERAL KJELL LAUGERUD GARCIA AND
MARIO SANDOVAL ALARCON PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF
GUATEMALA. THE VOTE WAS 38 TO 2 WITH ONE ABSTENTION
AND 13 OPPOSITION DEPUTIES WALKED OUT BEFORE THE TALLY.
THE ELECTION TOOK PLACE BEFORE GALLERIES PACKED WITH
ARDENT SUPPORTERS OF SANDOVAL, WHO LEADS THE HARD-LINE
RIGHT WING MLN. THEY CHEERED WILDLY FOR THEIR TEAM
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AND BOOED AND HISSED OMINOUSLY AT EVERY OPPOSITION

EFFORT TO QUESTION THE BIZARRE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THE MOOD OF THE OCCASION WAS PERHAPS BEST CAPTURED BY ONE OF THE GOVERNMENT DELEGATES WHO SAID THAT HE WOULD HAVE VOTED FOR LAUGERUD WHETHER HE GOT THE MOST ELECTORAL VOTES OR NOT (HE DID, BY THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNT), AND BY ONE OF THE TWO CONGRESSMEN WHO VOTED AGAINST LAUGERUD, SAYING IN THE PROCESS THAT HE WAS REMINDED OF ROMAN TIMES WHEN THE CROWDS SCREAMED FOR THE LIVES OF FALLEN GLADIATORS. LAUGERUD APPEARED ON NATIONAL TV NETWORK IN THE EVENING, ACCEPTING THE PRESIDENCY, ASSERTING THAT THE CONGRESSIONAL VOTE HAD ENDED THE ELECTORAL CONTEST, AND ASKING ALL GUATEMALANS TO FORGET PREVIOUS DISSENSIONS AND JOIN HIM IN WORKING FOR THE GOOD OF GUATEMALA.

2. LAUGERUD'S ELECTION IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED BY GROSS FRAUD, BUT THE ATTEMPTS OF LEFT-OF-CENTER CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC LED UNITED OPPOSITION FRONT CANDIDATE GENERAL RIOS MONTT TO FRUSTRATE A LAUGERUD VICTORY VIA "PEACEFUL RESISTANCE" HAVE CONTINUED TO BE INEFFECTIVE. ALTHOUGH 35,000 SOCCER FANS WILDLY BUT INEFFECTIVELY CHEERED A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC BANNER AT A SOCCER GAME ON MARCH 6, MILD-MANNERED STREET DEMONSTRATIONS IN FAVOR OF RIOS HAVE NEVER CONSISTED OF MORE THAN A THOUSAND AND HAVE EASILY BEEN BORKEN UP BY POLICE WITH TEAR GAS. THERE REMAINS AN OUTSIDE POSSIBILITY THAT RIOS COULD PROVOKE A COUP BY THE ARMY, WHICH WOULD ANNUL THE ELECTION. WE HAVE RECEIVED A NUMBER OF REPORTS RE COUP PLOTTING, AND ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO CORROBORATING INFORMATION, WE BELIEVE THERE IS CONSIDERABLE UNEASINESS IN THE ARMY. THIS UNREST WILL GROW IF RIOS' SUPPORTERS ARE ABLE TO MAINTAIN LOW-LEVEL DEMONSTRATIONS OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME. IF A COUP SHOULD COME, WE WOULD GUESS THAT IT WOULD BE LED BY MINISTER OF DEFENSE RUBIO, WHO WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO INSTALL RIOS IN THE PRESIDENCY BUT WOULD CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS AFTER AN UNSPECIFIED PERIOD OF TIME.

3. IT IS MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOG WILL BE
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ABLE TO KEEP THE LID ON, AND THAT LAUGERUD WILL ASSUME OFFICE ON JULY 1. IF THIS HAPPENS, WE HAVE ALREADY COMMENTED THAT LAUGERUD WILL BE HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT HE WOULD OWE HIS VICTORY IN LARGE PART TO HIS HARD-LINE RIGHT WING RUNNING MATE SANDOVAL, WHO WAS THE PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT OF THE FRAUD WHICH PUT HIM IN POWER. SANDOVAL CAN BE EXPECTED TO ATTEMPT TO BLOCK OR SLOW DOWN ANY MOVES LAUGERUD MAY MAKE TOWARDS ECONOMIC

AND SOCIAL REFORM. LAUGERUD'S STRENGTH WILL BE THAT SANDOVAL IS NOT POPULAR WITH THE ARMED FORCES.

4. WE ARE SURE THAT THE NATURE AND MAGNITUDE OF POPULAR DISCONTENT OVER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS FACING LAUGERUD (OR ANY HEAD OF GOVERNMENT) OVER THE NEXT YEAR, AND THE SMOLDERING RESENTMENT OF THOSE WHO FEEL THEY WERE CHEATED BY THE ELECTIONS, WILL MAKE HIS ROAD A ROCKY ONE. WHAT IS NOT YET CLEAR IS THE EXTENT THE LEFT, FRUSTRATED IN ITS ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS VIA DEMOCRATIC MEANS, WILL INCREASINGLY SUPPORT VIOLENCE, AT LEAST PASSIVELY, WHICH WOULD LEAD TO A NEW POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND RESURGENCE OF THE TERROR AND COUNTER-TERROR WHICH PLAGUED GUATEMALA ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO. WE WILL BE FOCUSING ON THIS QUESTION OVER THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS. WE WILL ALSO BE DOING WHAT WE CAN TO ENCOURAGE LAUGERUD TO MOVE TOWARDS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMS HE HAS TOLD US SO OFTEN HE FEELS ARE NECESSARY.

5. AS A FINAL NOTE ON THIS UNUSUAL ELECTION SITUATION, THERE HAS STILL BEEN NO OFFICIAL WORK WHATSOEVER REGARDING THE RESULTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS, AND WE HAVE NO IDEA ABOUT THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW CONGRESS.
MELOY

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